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IN THE CLAIMS:

Amended claims follow:

1. (Currently Amended) A system for negotiating multi-path connections between a plurality of intermediary devices in a networked computing environment, comprising:

a client-side network protocol stack defined on an intermediary device available from a plurality of intermediary devices on a primary communications channel and establishing a client-side connection between a requesting client and the intermediary device in accordance with a connection-oriented network protocol;

a server-side network protocol stack establishing a server-side connection between the intermediary device and a requested server on a primary communications channel in accordance with the connection-oriented network protocol;

a synchronization module determining differences in connection parameters defined for the client-side connection and the server-side connection and communicating the connection parameter differences to at least one other such intermediary device over an out-of-band communications channel, the synchronization module deferring communicating the connection parameter differences for transitory connections.

2. (Original) A system according to Claim 1, further comprising:

the synchronization module communicating a service request initially received from the requesting client to the at least one other such intermediary device while establishing the client-side connection over the out-of-band communications channel.

3. (Cancelled)

4. (Original) A system according to Claim 1, wherein the out-of-band communications channel comprises at least one of a broadcast, multicast, or point-to-point channel.

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5. (Original) A system according to Claim 1, wherein the connection-oriented network protocol comprises the Transmission Control Protocol (TCP).

6. (Original) A system according to Claim 1, wherein the intermediary device comprises at least one of a firewall and a boundary controller.

7. (Currently Amended) A method for negotiating multi-path connections between a plurality of intermediary devices in a networked computing environment, comprising:

establishing a client-side connection between a requesting client and an intermediary device available from a plurality of intermediary devices on a primary communications channel in accordance with a connection-oriented network protocol;

establishing a server-side connection between the intermediary device and a requested server on a primary communications channel in accordance with the connection-oriented network protocol;

determining differences in connection parameters defined for the client-side connection and the server-side connection; and

communicating the connection parameter differences to at least one other such intermediary device over an out-of-band communications channel; and

deferring communicating the connection parameter differences for transitory connections.

8. (Original) A method according to Claim 7, further comprising:

communicating a service request initially received from the requesting client to the at least one other such intermediary device while establishing the client-side connection over the out-of-band communications channel.

9. (Cancelled)

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10. (Original) A method according to Claim 7, wherein the out-of-band communications channel comprises at least one of a broadcast, multicast, or point-to-point channel.

11. (Original) A method according to Claim 7, wherein the connection-oriented network protocol comprises the Transmission Control Protocol (TCP).

12. (Original) A computer-readable storage medium holding code for performing the method of Claim 7.

13.-20. (Cancelled)

21. (New) A system according to Claim 1, wherein the connection parameter differences include a difference between TCP session sequence numbers during a TCP communications session.

22. (New) A system according to Claim 1, wherein the transitory connections include short duration connections used for simple data exchanges.

23. (New) A system according to Claim 1, wherein the synchronization module allows packets to flow directly through to the requesting client and the requested server.

24. (New) A system according to Claim 1, wherein the synchronization module is incorporated in a firewall network protocol stack running on a firewall.

25. (New) A system according to Claim 1, wherein the connection parameter differences are communicated after sending an acknowledgement response from the requested server to the requesting client and before sending an acknowledgement response from the requesting client to the requested server.